

Five Truths Concerning the Lord's Table

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 11:23-29

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Well, 1 Corinthians 11 as we look afresh at this text on the Lord's Table. Those of you who are good note-takers and daters of my sermons, you'll know that I've preached from this text numerous times. You know, when you stay somewhere over 40 years, then you preach on the major, major texts a lot, however, this is a brand new outline and a brand new message so you can't say, "Well, he preached that right there. I saw that." This one's a new one.

You know, the Lord's Table, this observance God has given his local church is one of those things that's meant to remind us that we're inseparably connected with eternity, to maybe jolt us afresh that what we're experiencing now in time and space history is just a little tiny speck of all that's there. We were in the heart of God in eternity past as he foreordained that he would have a people and build his church. We're a part of God's communion and God's fellowship now as his elect, regenerate, born again children but it doesn't end with this. This is just a little passing over sojourn, if you will, and we connect all the way to eternity, and among other glorious things, that's one of the things that we need to be mindful of when we take the Lord's Table, that by God's doing we are connected to the eternal God and shall never perish.

Let's look at it together. We'll look at verses 23 through 29 of 1 Corinthians 11. Paul writes,

23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. 27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.

Now I'll not take the time to unpack all that's here. That would take actually several messages but I do want to give you five key truths, five key truths concerning the Lord's Table. Five things I want you to think on this morning, grasp afresh as we share as a local church body together in what we sometimes call Communion or the Lord's Table.

First of all, let's note its divine authorization. Actually I could use the word "sanction" there, its divine sanction, but I'll use the word its divine authorization. We see in verse 23, Paul said, "I'm going to deliver to you," now notice his wording, "what I received from the Lord." That means this didn't come from me. The instruction, the command, if you will, that we partake of this ordinance, this Communion together, came from God, a divine revelation to Paul. So Paul is saying here, "Now what I'm teaching you, church, is not something that I received from the narrative of the Lord's original installation of the Lord's Table. I'm not teaching you or sharing with you something I've learned from others. This is not a creative element that came out of my mind that I think might be best for the churches to observe and practice. I did not get these instructions even from the most eminent apostle or even trustworthy eyewitnesses to the first Lord's Supper. No, it's greater than that. I got this by direct divine revelation from the Lord. I received it from the Lord." And matter of fact, the Apostle Paul establishes that the totality of the doctrine he preached and the gospel which is saying basically the same thing, the gospel that he preached came to him by divine revelation.

Now this is something outside of our comprehension today. God is not giving divine, direct, authoritative revelation to men today. He did that through his early apostles and they wrote down the sacred texts that we would have there in our Bibles, the faith once for all delivered to the saints. But those early men were wrought upon by the Spirit of God to give the binding, authoritating truth of God to the church for all generations. For example, in Galatians 1:11 and 12 Paul writes, "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man." The gospel I preach is not of man's making. Then verse 12 of Galatians 1, "For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." And actually in all the times I've preached on the Lord's Table, I've never brought this out, that Paul specifically says here, "This isn't just a story or an oral tradition of how the Lord did it, God gave me the specifics that you're to hold and practice as the church concerning the Lord's Table."

So we notice its divine authorization or its divine sanction. It came from God. He thought it up. Now II: note its divine sanctification. And you'll know that the word "sanctification" simply means "to be set apart." It's the idea that something is not of a profane or a base realm, that this is sanctified. It's unique and set apart. It has a purpose. It is from God and it has, has a purpose for God.

The text clearly says in verse 25, "In the same way He took the cup," here's the phrase, "also after supper." And I think the point is made there, the reason Paul writes it like that is because the Lord's Table wasn't just a part of another meal. The regular supper, the regular meal had finished. It was over and then the Lord did something distinctly new, separate and different when he instituted the Lord's Supper or Communion as it's

sometimes called. So this supper is unique. It is set apart. It is given by God. It should be separate from all of the suppers, all other remembrances and all other ordinances and, of course, there is only one other ordinance and that is baptism. So being separate, it stands alone. In one sense, you can never say, "Well, the Lord's Table is like this," because it's not like anything else. It's unique. There's nothing else we do that's like the Lord's Table.

Now the message of the Lord's Table in so many ways is like the message of the ordinance of baptism. It proclaims Christ and the work of Christ in saving us but it's also unique in many ways. It has a sanctified element to it. It's different. For example, a father may be sitting around the table one evening at supper time and the father may say, "You know, we're all Christians now, we all believe in the Lord, and we're all sharing in a meal together, so this is like the Lord's Supper." Well, the Lord is present whenever we're fellowshiping in him, of course, but that is not like the Lord's Supper. It's distinct from those type fellowships. It's unique and it's very special.

Now a significant part of the supper sanctification is that it is given as a local church ordinance. You might say it's given to the church. It's not to be toyed with or tampered with or taken lightly and in lighter fellowships or more or trivial might be a good word, trivial settings. It's a special and sanctified ordinance given to the local church. It's not intended for any other setting. The Lord's Table is a communion with Christ and a communion with his church, one to the other. It's to be only observed in his church.

Now in talking about its sanctification, let me mention four quick thoughts here about it being not just sanctified but closely akin to that word, it's holy. That's one of the ideas of sanctification is something is set apart as holy unto the Lord. Well, we know it's a holy ordinance because it was given, again, by divine direct revelation. That's very unique. Now there are many times where the Bible says something along the line of the apostles did what seemed best to them. There are dozens and dozens, could we say hundreds of things we do in the church that we have no divine direct authority about it. It's just what we think is wisest and best. There's nothing in the Bible about having a student camp every summer. There's nothing in the Bible about having a kid's camp every summer. There's nothing in the Bible about having a vacation Bible school. No specific instruction on that. Now we think it's good and wise, we think it's best, but those things are not in the league with this holy ordinance that God gave directly to Paul the specifics of what it is about and how we are to observe it. It has a unique, holy sanctification. It was given by divine direct revelation.

Secondly, it's a holy ordinance because he says in verse 25 it proclaims the Lord's death. Don't just gloss over that. Proclaiming the Lord's death through this holy ordinance means this is, indeed, holy ground.

Thirdly, not only is it a holy ordinance because it came by divine revelation and it proclaims the Lord's death but also he said, "Do it in remembrance of Me," and he is the holy one. "Remember Me. Remember what I've done to forgive you and save you."

And then, fourthly, he warns in verse 27 that when we approach this supper, we must not approach it in an unworthy manner. Why? It's a holy ordinance.

So we notice that this supper is given a divine authorization or sanction. We notice this Lord's Table is giving a divine sanctification, it's unique, it's special. There's nothing else like it. But thirdly, let's notice its divine interpretation. In other words, as Paul was giving the instruction on the Lord's Table, it wasn't just up to us to put our own understanding on it or our, our, our own meaning to it. God has told us what we are to understand about the Lord's Table.

So how does God want us to interpret this supper? How are we to understand it? Are we to lean over here with our Roman Catholic friends and Roman Catholic theology says that the Lord's Supper is a part of the Mass, it has to be administered by a priest and somehow in taking the wafer and in somehow in drinking the wine, Christ's very body is, in effect, crucified for you again and you swallow his very body because transubstantiation, the Roman Catholic doctrine, teaches that the bread actually becomes the body of Christ? And when you drink the wine in, in Roman theology, it means the, the juice actually becomes the blood of Christ? And so in partaking of what they would call this sacrament in the church, you are actually doing a work, a ritual that helps secure your soul and gain your own salvation, are we to lean in that direction? Of course we're not. That's man adding to the ordinance what God hasn't added. And I will say again and I've said it many times, but you need to understand because the principles of false teaching occur everywhere under all kinds of headings but it's an effort to make the people dependent upon the church because they would tell you you've got to have the impartation of this sacrament in order to gain the salvation you long for. I want to tell you with all the passion of my soul, your salvation does not depend upon Jeff Noblit or the church elders, or the church staff, or some priest. We administer nothing. We preach the word that reveals to you Christ and you go to Christ in faith and he and he alone secures and saves your soul.

So it's important that we have the interpretation of what does this mean. Well, three thoughts here. You could probably have four or seven even, but three key thoughts about the understanding of the supper. First of all, it is meant to be a symbol and therefore a reminder of Christ and his saving work. The Lord uses the emblem of bread and in the earlier gospel he says, "This bread is My body." In other words, "It symbolizes My body." Then the symbol of wine, "This, this wine is the new covenant in My blood." And then the symbol of him distributing it as he breaks the bread and passes it around. It's the symbol of how out of Christ's very being and life and work on the cross, he, he distributes to us forgiveness and new eternal life. These are symbols and reminders.

Brothers and sisters, I submit to you a view that takes these things as little, literally sort of magically becoming Christ as we eat them. You can go to any witch doctor in the bush of Africa and get the same teaching and principle. It's a silly superstition and our forefathers died to stand against it and reject it. You must trust Christ not a ritual inside the church house to save you, and these emblems of the Table are symbolic to remind us that he and he alone is mighty to save.

Well, it's a symbol of Christ in a saving work, also it's a celebration of our salvation. Brothers and sisters, we remind ourselves this morning that the Lord's Table is not a fast, it's a feast. It's not a time when we sing a woeful dirge. We're not here this morning to sing the blues, and I like the blues but not about Jesus. Nothing blue about him. And we're not here to sing the blues or to sing a dirge, we're to sing the joy of the security of our salvation in this glorious worthy one, Jesus Christ.

So it is a symbol of Christ in his saving work. It is a celebration of our salvation, but also in interpreting it or understanding it, let's notice that it is a communion of deepest commonality. It is a communion of deepest commonality. Now in October, I'm supposed to get another grandchild and watching my wife with my children when they were just tiny infants and watching my daughters with their babies, there's nothing in the human realm that can really grasp the depth of the bond between a mom and her newborn baby. But even that pales in comparison to the bond we have in Christ and we have together because, moms, when you get to heaven, as precious as that baby is, she will not be your baby in heaven. Now I think there'll be even a more glorious unity but heaven but it won't be that kind of unity you knew as mom and child. It's better than that.

And so what we have as the redeemed of the Lord and what we share together and particularly what's to be thought of and pointed out and made aware and afresh in our hearts and minds during the Lord's Table is that we have a communion of deepest commonality. We are one with him. We take the Supper, taking in the bread, remembering his body is one with us. His body was crushed for us. His life lives in us. We are one with him and he is one with us.

Let's listen to the words of the high priestly prayer in John 17:20-21. Jesus talks to the Father and he says, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone," that means those believers who are there around him at that time, "but for those also who believe in Me through their word," that's us, we believe through the word they recorded in Scripture. So what's Jesus ask? Verse 21, "that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, so that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me." The Lord is praying that, "I want them to grow in grasping the commonality, the union, the oneness they have in Christ together, and that's the most powerful way they can show the world that I'm real." The way we love, care for, consider ourselves united. And the Lord's Supper more than anything God's given us is to point that out and bring that afresh to our minds. We're one Lord, one faith, one baptism, Paul writes to the church at Ephesus, emphasizing that no matter where you come from or where you are, we all believed in the same Lord, we all have the same basic tenets of our faith, we all were baptized with the same profession through believer's baptism, we're all one.

And then in John 17:11 Jesus said, "I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves," my children, "are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one," well, what kind of oneness, Jesus, "even as We are." Can you just pause for a moment. Can you use the gray matter God put between your ears, just summons up all of it and try to

contemplate for a moment the intimacy of God the Father with God the Son and God the Son with God the Father. You just can't grasp it and Jesus says, "I want them to sense that commonality, that communion, that oneness that, Father, Me and You have." Well, it's developing right now. That oneness is growing right now as we grow together maturing in a local church, but it will be culminated on a day later.

So we are one with him. He is one with us and we are one with each other in him. So we've seen something of the divine authorization or sanction of this ordinance, God gave it to Paul. We've seen something of its divine sanctification, it's, it's not to be tagged onto a meal even though it would be find to have a meal and do the Lord's Supper. I'm not saying that's wrong but it, it stands alone. It's unique and special. And thirdly, the divine interpretation. It's a symbol for us to remember Christ and what he's done. It's a celebration of all that he's done for us and it's a communion of the deepest commonality. Now number 4: its divine proclamation. Whatever else the Supper says, he says in verse 26, we "proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." We proclaim the Lord's death. That means when we take the Supper, it's important – now listen to me – we don't just proclaim that he died. Anybody can do that. No, no, no, we grasp more than just he died, he's not just an example of unselfishness, though he was radically unselfish. It's more than that. Why did he die and what he accomplished in his death is what we proclaim.

Now in the context, the Corinthian church was missing it. As Paul writes to them, he's already pointed out that in their carnality and in their immaturity they were not using the Lord's Supper to proclaim him and his death, they were using it to get drunk. They were using it just to fill up and be gluttonous. So in effect in their gross immaturity, they were proclaiming that the Lord's death was insignificant. They were in effect proclaiming the Lord's death is unimportant and Paul's trying to rope them in and get them back on track.

In verse 27, that's why he says, "Therefore anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord." What does it mean by "an unworthy manner"? I believe a lot of you sitting here this morning have a false and wrong concept of what it means to take the Supper in an unworthy manner. An unworthy manner means coming to the Supper with a proud heart, coming to the Supper with a proud heart and giving to the Supper any meaning other than the meaning the Lord gave it. That's coming in an unworthy manner.

To come to the Table in a worthy manner does not mean we have to become worthy before we come, then none of us would ever come, then none of us would ever take of the Supper. So coming in a worthy manner does not believer, mean you go through some sort of purging, some sort of cleansing experience and say, "Aha, now I can take the Supper. Now I'm worthy." No, you just went backwards. Now you're proud. Now you're arrogant and you by thinking you became worthy actually became more unworthy. Coming to the Supper in a worthy manner – now listen to your pastor – is to come in humility and to come with a heart proclaiming him and him alone as worthy. You're coming to say, "Here I am, Father. I partake of this precious communion, the Lord's Table, and I come with the radical depths of unworthiness and I come proclaiming that the One represented in these elements is the only worthy One."

By the way, he's not just worthy in his person, he's worthy in his work. The Father looked at the Son's death for us on the cross and the Father says, "That's a worthy sacrifice. That's a worthy atonement. That right there is worth all the demands of My high justice so now I can declare My children who in and of themselves are wholly unworthy, as worthy because the worthy One gave a worthy death in their place." That's how you come worthy, confessing your unworthiness and confessing his whole worthiness.

If one comes to the Supper supposing that the Supper is some sort of work or, or ritual that somehow pleases God and helps us achieve a worthiness or even our salvation, that's just pride. That's coming in an unworthy manner. But come to the Supper humble and thankful, that though we are all equally wholly unworthy of him and the salvation he's given us, yet this attitude is the only way we come in a worthy manner. As we all take of the Supper today as committed repenters of what we are and how we perform, but come celebrating, "I may be woefully unworthy and I may be bankrupt as I stand before the holiness of God but I come holding to the One who is wholly worthy." And that's my joy and that's my celebration, that's my satisfaction. How powerful that is.

So the divine proclamation that we make as we take of the bread and take of the juice and commune together is we proclaim Christ the worthy one, who in his grace has made us now worthy. So we proclaim this to ourselves. When you take the Supper, you're telling yourself afresh, "We're sinners but He's our Savior." We proclaim it to God, we say afresh, "O Lord, He's the worthy One and it's all about Him and He saved us and we, we refresh and place again our faith and trust in Your Son Jesus Christ." We proclaim it to each other. We say, "Friend, brother in Christ, sister in Christ, let's partake together and encourage one another afresh that though we are all the unworthy ones, He, the One represented here, is the worthy One, and specifically in His death for our sins." We proclaim the Supper to the world. We say to the world, "Trust in what you want to trust in, hold to what you want to hold to. We will cling to Christ." And we proclaim it to sinners who are not yet forgiven. Some of you can't take of the Supper because you haven't come to a settled faith in Jesus Christ. You haven't been baptized and added to a local congregation. So it's not for you yet. It doesn't mean you're less than any of the rest of us, you just haven't become one of his, so we proclaim to you, "Look, fellow unworthy one, take the free gift represented in these elements and know the forgiveness. He'll distribute it to you and distribute to you eternal life."

Lastly, its divine termination. It wasn't meant to last forever. Verse 26, the Lord said we're to do these things "until He comes." In a sense, what we're gonna do today, this is just the appetizer. This is a foreshadowing of, of what's to come. If I can say this in the proper way, I guess I'd have to say it anthropomorphically just from a human perspective that Jesus in, is in heaven and Jesus is even now woefully unhappy in the way it's being done right now. Now that's not true theologically, it's just for, for, for purposes of illustration because he didn't save us to leave us in our sinful bodies, he didn't save us to leave us in this woeful, sinful, judge-condemned world, he saved us to be with him. So he says, "The, the Supper you take right now holy and wonderful and special and God-given is, is, is wondrous but it's not the main thing yet." This Supper's gonna end one day. By

divine edict this Supper is to be practiced in local churches until he returns and then it will be terminated. It's terminated as the bud terminates to the full bloom for in that day we will no longer need the symbol because we will have him.

Oh my goodness, I pray that there's a longing in your heart that as you touch that bread wafer and as you drink that juice, that you say, "Oh, for the day when I don't need the symbol any longer because I will be with Him." Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 26:29, "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." Now in my mind I want to picture the Lord sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on High and there's a little table beside the Lord and there's a, a goblet there on that table and one of the angels would say, "Lord, why do You sit here with that vessel beside You?" "That's just to remind Me everyday that soon I'm going to take this new glorious Supper with My children when I gather them all together to Myself." And I just can't help but say this – are you listening – he'll not lose one. Every single one of his will be there to get in on that Supper.

He spoke of that day. He prays for that day or at least he has prayed for that day in John 17:24. He's praying to the Father, "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am." That's what this is all pointing to. This is not just something we go through and maybe this pleases the Lord and maybe this gives me a, a, a check box or two, checked off in heaven that I'll get closer to [unintelligible] No! No! This is just a reminder, a stimulant, if you will, of the greater communion that is to come.

The Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table we take today will one day terminate and the marriage supper of the Lamb will commence. Revelation 19:6-9, "Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.' It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, 'Write, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."' Not to the Lord's Table. This is a new Supper and we'll never partake of this Supper again.

Revelation 21:1-4, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem," I think that's a picture of the church, "coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold,'" now here's the key, "the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them," that's the difference, you see. Not symbolically anymore, he's there and we're there with him. "And they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them." And there are some wonderful reciprocal byproducts of this, verse 4, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes." You have tears in your eyes this morning? You have tears in your heart this morning? They're temporary. They're gonna be terminated too. If one moment in heaven when we're with Christ for one moment, if you think, "I'm just a little down." Jesus would say, "Time out. Not here. That's gone. That's of the old

order." Figure of speech because it can't happen once we're glorified. You can't be sad anymore. Not another tear. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, "and there will no longer be any death," no more funerals, no more funeral homes, "there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

The Lord's Table we take this morning is a part of the first things but it's not a part of the final things. When, um, there's a wedding rehearsal here at the church, it's quite common during the wedding rehearsal for one of the bridesmaids to stand in for the bride. That way the bride during the rehearsal can sit back there and watch and just see how it all looks, make sure she's happy with everything. But I've never one time in over 40 years of doing weddings saw the bridesmaid stand in at the actual wedding. No, no, no, that symbol is okay during the rehearsal but when the real thing happens, she's gonna be there.

Well, these symbols we glory in in the Lord's Table are important now, divinely ordained, but they don't matter when the real thing happens. In that day we will no longer symbolize the glorious truths of our salvation, we will realize them. Justification. Sanctification. Glorification. All complete. We will no longer look for them by faith, we will walk in them forever and together we will walk with him forever. The glorious termination of the Lord's Table.